

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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IN RE: :
 :
THE EL FARO INCIDENT OFF THE: NTSB Accident No.
COAST OF THE BAHAMAS ON : DCA16MM001
OCTOBER 1, 2015 :
 :
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INTERVIEW OF: LT [REDACTED]

Tuesday,
October 13, 2015

USCG Seventh District Command Center
Miami, Florida

BEFORE:

JON FURUKAWA, NTSB
DENNIS BRYSON, ABS
PATTY FINSTERBUSCH, TOTE Services
PAUL WEBB, U.S. Coast Guard

PRESENT ON BEHALF OF THE INTERVIEWEE:

CDR [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard JAG Corps

This transcript was produced from audio
provided by the National Transportation Safety Board.

Furukawa Robert

From: [REDACTED] CDR <[REDACTED]@uscg.mil>
Sent: Friday, November 27, 2015 1:55 PM
To: Furukawa Robert
Subject: [REDACTED] - Transcript

Robert:

LT [REDACTED] has no changes to his transcript.

V/r
[REDACTED]

CDR [REDACTED]
Chief, S&R National Center of Expertise
National Maritime Center
100 Forbes Dr.
Martinsburg, WV 25404
[REDACTED] (w)
[REDACTED] (m)

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 4:26 p.m.

3 MR. FURUKAWA: And it is Tuesday the 13th of
4 October 2015. It is 1626. The time is 1626. We're at
5 the U.S. Coast Guard, District Seven Command Center in
6 Miami, Florida.

7 We're here to interview Lieutenant [REDACTED]
8 [REDACTED] At the time of the accident, he wasn't a watch
9 stander, he was a day worker. And his collateral duty
10 as Command Center Chief Deputy.

11 Okay. And can I call you [REDACTED]

12 LT. [REDACTED] Of course.

13 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. And [REDACTED] you know
14 that you're being recorded?

15 LT. [REDACTED] Yes.

16 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. So, when were you on -
17 - so for this SAR operation, when did you start work?

18 LT. [REDACTED] I would have came in, it would
19 have been around 8:00, 8:15.

20 MR. FURUKAWA: On what day?

21 LT. [REDACTED] It would have been on Friday.

22 MR. FURUKAWA: On Friday.

23 LT. [REDACTED] October 2.

24 MR. FURUKAWA: October 2, okay. What time
25 was that that you came in again?

1 LT. [REDACTED] Around 8:00, 8:15, if I
2 recollect. I got a call from Seaman Chief [REDACTED]
3 asking if I was -- what time I was coming in. I was in
4 traffic at the time.

5 I had asked what was going on? He said that
6 there was a big case developing and we needed
7 additional oversight. And so, I came in as normally as
8 I come in.

9 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. Was that your day off?
10 Or was --

11 LT. [REDACTED] No. A scheduled.

12 MR. FURUKAWA: That a regular workday?

13 LT. [REDACTED] A scheduled workday.

14 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. What time do you
15 normally show up for work on a workday?

16 LT. [REDACTED] On a regular workday, not a duty
17 day, it will depend. I have a little bit of
18 flexibility with my supervisor. I tend to like to come
19 in at 6:00 when they normally do the watch relief.

20 So I'll normally do a 6:00 to 2:00 for my
21 day workday. But depending on family and stuff, if I
22 have other stuff coming on, then I'll do, you know, a
23 flex where, you know, 8:00 to 4:00, something like
24 that, so.

25 Most days I like to try to be in for 6:00

1 though.

2 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. So, on Friday, October
3 2, you were going to do a flex day?

4 LT. [REDACTED] Yes.

5 MR. FURUKAWA: Yes. 8:00 to 4:00, okay.
6 And let's see. Can you describe your position as
7 Command Center Chief Deputy?

8 LT. [REDACTED] Okay. It's technically a
9 collateral. I was assigned here as a primary
10 Controller. I'm a qualified Command Duty Officer here.
11 I've been here about two years.

12 I was handpicked by the Command Center Chief
13 to kind of fill a Deputy role and to assist with the
14 oversight in the management piece. So, my month is
15 kind of broken up between scheduled duty days, but I'll
16 have a bunch of day working days where I'll assist with
17 the oversight management and personnel.

18 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. Can you describe your
19 duties as, you said, primary position as a Controller?

20 LT. [REDACTED] Yes.

21 MR. FURUKAWA: Is that just it, Controller
22 or?

23 LT. [REDACTED] Well, my qualification is a
24 Command Duty Officer. My --

25 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. So, your primary is a

1 CDO?

2 LT. [REDACTED] Correct.

3 MR. FURUKAWA: Command Duty Officer. Okay.
4 Yes, go ahead and describe your duties as Command Duty
5 Officer.

6 LT. [REDACTED] So, as a District Seven Command
7 Duty Officer, I mean, we're -- it kind of -- the focal
8 point for the operations in the area, we're responsible
9 for oversight down to our units below us. And then
10 filter that information up.

11 And so we provide the oversight down. And
12 then the proper briefings up to the chain of command
13 for the other people to make the decisions.

14 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. And hang on a second.
15 I think I forgot to go around asking people their
16 names. Did we do that?

17 CDR [REDACTED] We did not do that.

18 MR. FURUKAWA: Oh, I'm sorry.

19 MR. BRYSON: We didn't do it on the tape.

20 MR. FURUKAWA: Not on tape. Yes, so I'm
21 sorry. This is John Furukawa, NTSB. And I'm the Group
22 Chairman for the Survival Factors Group.

23 MS. FINSTERBUSCH: Patricia Finsterbusch,
24 TOTE Services and a member of the Survival Factors
25 Group.

1 MR. BRYSON: Dennis Bryson, ABS. Member of
2 the Survival Factors Group.

3 MR. WEBB: Paul Webb, with B17, U.S. Coast
4 Guard, Survival Factors Group.

5 CDR [REDACTED] Commander [REDACTED] Coast
6 Guard JAG. Kind of held as representative here at this
7 interview.

8 MR. FURUKAWA: And why don't you go ahead
9 and state your name and rank.

10 LT. [REDACTED] Lieutenant [REDACTED] I'm
11 Command Center Chief Deputy and qualified Command Duty
12 Officer here at District Seven.

13 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. Thank you, [REDACTED]
14 And so that was a flex day from 8:00 to 4:00. What
15 time did you actually leave -- did you work until that
16 day?

17 LT. [REDACTED] I don't recall. I don't recall
18 what time I departed that day.

19 MR. FURUKAWA: But it was after 4:00?

20 LT. [REDACTED] I don't know. I don't recall. I
21 remember it being a full day. I didn't leave early.
22 But I don't know if it was exactly at 4:00 or how much
23 further after it was.

24 But yes, just a normal eight-hour day.

25 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. Was it dark when you

1 left?

2 LT. [REDACTED] No, it was not. It was -- the
3 sun was setting.

4 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. Let's see, this was
5 the second day. Okay. Okay, and [REDACTED] why don't you
6 -- how old are you?

7 LT. [REDACTED] Thirty-five.

8 MR. FURUKAWA: Thirty-five. And how long
9 have you been in the Coast Guard?

10 LT. [REDACTED] Sixteen years.

11 MR. FURUKAWA: Sixteen years. And can you -
12 - what have you done for those 16 years in the Coast
13 Guard? Your duties? Experience?

14 LT. [REDACTED] I guess my experience, enlisted
15 in '99. Was at a small boat station as a non-rate for
16 a year and a half. Was a basic crewman on the motor
17 lifeboats and the utility boat there at the station.
18 It was at Point Judith, Rhode Island.

19 From there I went to AMT A School, Aviation
20 Maintenance Technician A School. Got stationed in
21 Clearwater, Florida. Did my training in Elizabeth
22 City, North Carolina.

23 And then was in -- stationed there for about
24 four years. While stationed there, Station Clearwater
25 was part of the Op BAT deployment, so operations to

1 Bahamas and Turks. So, a good portion of that time was
2 spent deployed down in the Bahamas.

3 From there I was stationed in Elizabeth
4 City, North Carolina. One year at the Aircraft Repair
5 and Supply Center as an end of the line product line
6 mechanic. And then two years at the air station.

7 And it was my last year there, I got picked
8 up for Officer Candidate School. Went to Officer
9 Candidate School. Out of there I went to Maritime
10 Safety and Security Team Boston for two and a half
11 years as the water side in Maritime Law
12 Enforcement/Force Protection Team Leader.

13 I was a Deployable Team Leader there. After
14 that I went to the Deployable Operations Group. Kind
15 of the Coast Guard's Deployable Specialized Forces
16 Headquarters Unit at the time.

17 I was there for two years until they were
18 disestablished and then received the orders here to
19 District Seven in the Command Center.

20 MR. FURUKAWA: So in your Deployment
21 Operations Group, that was at Boston?

22 LT. [REDACTED] Yes.

23 MR. FURUKAWA: Commons? Okay.

24 LT. [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

25 MR. FURUKAWA: You probably had my old

1 office. Okay. And how long have you been here now?

2 LT. [REDACTED] I've been here about two and --
3 two, going on two and a half years. I'm transferring
4 out this coming spring.

5 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. Okay. Any questions
6 about his -- [REDACTED] background?

7 (No response)

8 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. Let's see. Do you
9 have any questions?

10 MR. WEBB: Yes. On Friday when you showed
11 up for work, what were your duties in the Command
12 Center? This is Paul Webb.

13 LT. [REDACTED] My duties in the Command Center
14 is I got to work and immediately noticed it was busy.
15 High volume of calls. Commander [REDACTED] was
16 originally supposed to be breaking in as the Operations
17 Unit LE that day. He was slid over to the SAR desk to
18 augment all the other district cases.

19 So I kind of took on his role as just kind
20 of oversight for the Command Center. Assisted in
21 anything they needed, ensuring that, you know, they
22 were properly staffed and weren't overwhelmed.

23 MR. FURUKAWA: Were you involved with any of
24 the decision making that day on risk or search planning
25 or anything?

1 LT. [REDACTED] I was involved in the
2 discussions. I wasn't the decision maker. I left that
3 up to those that were on duty.

4 MR. BRYSON: This is Dennis Bryson. So, how
5 many people were in the Command Center when you showed
6 up on that day?

7 LT. [REDACTED] On Friday, it would have been
8 myself, Senior Chief [REDACTED] I believe he was day
9 working as well. Chief [REDACTED] I think was CDO.

10 And then we would have had two SAR --
11 qualified SAR watch standers. One that was primarily
12 involved in the SAR planning for the El Faro case. And
13 Commander [REDACTED] who was kind of taking on the brunt
14 of the rest of the District cases.

15 And then we had -- it would have been our
16 Law Enforcement Duty Officer as well.

17 MR. BRYSON: So roughly seven?

18 LT. [REDACTED] Five to six.

19 MR. BRYSON: Okay.

20 MR. FURUKAWA: Would it be five watch
21 standers and then three extra day workers that were on
22 the floor?

23 LT. [REDACTED] Yes. Myself and then Senior
24 Chief [REDACTED] would have been the day workers kind of
25 off the floor. But, you know, I was actively assisting

1 the floor, yes.

2 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay.

3 MR. BRYSON: Do you by any chance remember
4 how many SAR cases were active when you got in?

5 LT. [REDACTED] I don't. I don't remember how
6 many they had active. I know they were busy the night
7 before. I don't know the details of the case. But I
8 know there was a pretty significant case where they had
9 hoisted 13 people the night before.

10 But as for how many open cases there were
11 when I got there, I don't know.

12 MR. WEBB: Did you say that one person was
13 assigned to the Faro case? And then Commander [REDACTED]
14 was doing all the other SAR?

15 LT. [REDACTED] Yes. What we had done in the
16 past from our missing teens case that gained a lot of
17 attention, was when we get inundated with calls, we'll
18 assign a separate SAR Controller.

19 One will primarily focus on what the normal
20 SAR Controller would do. And in events like this, you
21 know, the high profile needs, we'll dedicate a single
22 SAR Controller for the SAR planning so that they don't
23 get distracted with the other cases.

24 MR. FURUKAWA: You called that missing
25 teens?

1 LT. [REDACTED] Well, there was a -- I forget, a
2 couple months back, there was two 14 year old missing
3 boys left out at Jupiter Inlet. It was in the new on
4 CNN.

5 CDR [REDACTED] It was pretty big news.

6 LT. [REDACTED] Yes. Significant media case for
7 two over due teens.

8 MR. FURUKAWA: And that's when you first
9 started --

10 LT. [REDACTED] Yes.

11 MR. FURUKAWA: Having one person cover that.
12 Okay.

13 MR. WEBB: So that wasn't standard policy
14 before?

15 LT. [REDACTED] It wasn't standard policy. But I
16 would say best practice to kind of not inundate the one
17 SAR Controller. And we kind of projected out. We saw
18 the need for it on Friday.

19 I'm also the watch scheduler. So, I
20 projected out just a ballpark throughout the rest of
21 the week to ensure that we had that dual coverage.

22 MR. WEBB: And was it Petty Officer [REDACTED]
23 was assigned as the SAR Controller for the El Faro?

24 LT. [REDACTED] Correct. Yes. When I got there,
25 yes, he was the primary SAR Controller directly

1 involved with the El Faro case.

2 MR. FURUKAWA: Did you review any of the SAR
3 Ops that they were working at that point?

4 LT. [REDACTED] No.

5 MR. FURUKAWA: So, through the 2nd to the
6 4th you basically did the same thing?

7 LT. [REDACTED] I did. I was there, so a full
8 day on Friday. Heavily engaged. And then Saturday was
9 probably a half day. I went in and ensured that --
10 took the load of a lot of the conference calls that the
11 senior staff was having in the back conference room,
12 and sharing that with set up.

13 And any deliverables that Captain Coggeshall
14 wanted to kind of facilitate between the watch floor
15 and Captain Coggeshall at the time while he was in. So
16 I probably cut out I'd say around 11:00 or 12:00 on
17 Saturday.

18 And then came back in on Sunday. And Sunday
19 was a full day.

20 MR. FURUKAWA: Did you have any time off on
21 Monday the 5th? Or did you start watches again?

22 LT. [REDACTED] Yes. No. No, I had three days
23 off following working Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

24 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. So, Monday, Tues --
25 the 5th, 6th and 7th. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday

1 were off?

2 LT. [REDACTED] Correct.

3 MR. FURUKAWA: So you weren't back until the
4 8th. On the 8th did you come back as a watch stander
5 or a day worker?

6 LT. [REDACTED] No, I came back in day working
7 that Thursday and Friday.

8 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. How is your schedule
9 for standing CDO and day working switch?

10 LT. [REDACTED] It's -- my schedule is kind of
11 flex. The Senior Chief is dedicated a billet as the
12 Command Center Supervisor. Whereas mine's not really a
13 billeted position, but it's a collateral.

14 So I'll, at a minimum, I'll do the two per
15 month. I typically average anywhere between I'd say
16 four to six with the additional responsibilities of the
17 day working, so.

18 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. So when it's just the
19 CDO, how many days a month are they working? A CDO?

20 LT. [REDACTED] Depending on how many people are
21 taking leave or TAD, our typical rotation will have
22 them standing roughly 12 to 13 watches a month.

23 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay.

24 LT. [REDACTED] We -- it's in our command -- not
25 expectations, but kind of the division for us to

1 maximize or both so they can focus weather on watch.
2 And as a scheduler I always try to maintain a two on,
3 three off rotation.

4 MR. FURUKAWA: You rate the watch rotation
5 as well?

6 LT. [REDACTED] I do.

7 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. So when someone's on
8 the -- ever in training or something like that, do you
9 -- that's where you throw yourself in and stand
10 watches?

11 LT. [REDACTED] Yes. I'll fill in during that
12 time. And I'll also -- I jump in the rotation
13 throughout the month.

14 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay.

15 MR. WEBB: This is Paul Webb. How many
16 people are assigned at a Command Site? How many
17 officers? How many enlists?

18 LT. [REDACTED] Like on the PAL?

19 MR. WEBB: Yes.

20 LT. [REDACTED] I wouldn't know off the top of my
21 head.

22 MR. WEBB: Or any -- how many do you have
23 right now, I guess?

24 LT. [REDACTED] Without having it in front of me,
25 I don't have a number. I could probably go through and

1 count on my fingers.

2 MR. WEBB: Let's do that.

3 MR. BRYSON: What's the PAL?

4 LT. [REDACTED] It's a --

5 MR. WEBB: Personnel Allowance List.

6 LT. [REDACTED] Yes. Personnel Allowance List.

7 How many billets we have. Well, let's see. So, for
8 officers, there's one, two, three Lieutenants. Four
9 Lieutenants.

10 For JGs there's let's see, five JGs. And
11 then for -- one Senior Chief. There are, let's see, so
12 -- two Chief Petty Officers.

13 Let's see, E6s, there's four E6s. Let's
14 see, Second Class Petty Officers, there's I'd say four
15 or five Second Classes. And then we have one Third
16 Class Petty Officer.

17 MR. WEBB: And you actually have a Third?

18 LT. [REDACTED] Yes.

19 MR. WEBB: Which stands what?

20 LT. [REDACTED] She's a SAR Controller.

21 MR. WEBB: Pardon me?

22 LT. [REDACTED] She's a SAR Controller.

23 MR. WEBB: A SAR Controller?

24 LT. [REDACTED] Um-hum. One of our best.

25 MR. WEBB: I'm surprised at a District

1 you've got a Third Class.

2 LT. [REDACTED] Yes.

3 MR. WEBB: So, who mostly stands the OE
4 Desk? Is that the OS Ones? Or do you have it all
5 mixed?

6 LT. [REDACTED] No, the -- it's all mixed. So,
7 we got this year in transfer season an LT and a JG
8 First class that came from Sector Miami. So they're
9 breaking into the situation unit right now.

10 But, I would say if you take, there's four
11 that are unqualified OUs right now. But everyone else
12 I've named has a minimum OU qualification.

13 The brunt of the SAR watches are handled by
14 the Junior Enlisted. The Majority of the JGs and the
15 LTs are Law Enforcement Duty Officers.

16 And then we have one First Class Petty
17 Officer that's CDO. But, other than that it's him and
18 then Chief and above stand CDO. In addition to our
19 GSs.

20 MR. WEBB: Yes. So how many GSs do you
21 have?

22 LT. [REDACTED] We have three dedicated to floor
23 and one GS-13 is our SAR Specialist.

24 MR. WEBB: Okay. So you got a 13, you got a
25 12 and two 11s?

1 LT. [REDACTED] Two 12s and one 11.

2 MR. WEBB: Two 12s.

3 LT. [REDACTED] Yes.

4 MR. WEBB: And one 11?

5 LT. [REDACTED] Um-hum.

6 MR. WEBB: So you would need to shift one of
7 the 11s into a 12 billet and do that?

8 LT. [REDACTED] Yes. Yes, that was done before I
9 got here.

10 MR. WEBB: Okay. And the 11 stands an OU?

11 LT. [REDACTED] He's Law Enforcement Duty
12 Officer.

13 MR. WEBB: Law Enforcement. Okay.

14 LT. [REDACTED] Yes. Retired Chief Petty
15 Officer.

16 MR. WEBB: And then the two 12s stand CDO?

17 LT. [REDACTED] Correct.

18 MR. WEBB: Okay. And the Petty's stand CDO.
19 And SMC call?

20 LT. [REDACTED] Yes. He's SMC access. And he'll
21 do his two a month for -- to maintain his CDO
22 qualification.

23 MR. WEBB: Okay. Just to -- I kind of show
24 you want the watch structure is, you know, kind of
25 fight the fatigue factor of watch standing. They can

1 watch for it.

2 LT. [REDACTED] Um-hum.

3 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. Any questions?

4 MS. FINSTERBUSCH: I have no questions.

5 MR. BRYSON: No.

6 MR. WEBB: Well, actually I don't have
7 anything further for you.

8 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. Okay, well, thank you
9 very much, [REDACTED] Before you go, before I close this,
10 as we're completing the interview, is there anything
11 you'd like to add or change?

12 LT. [REDACTED] No. No.

13 MR. FURUKAWA: Are there any questions that
14 we should have asked you but didn't?

15 LT. [REDACTED] No, I don't believe so.

16 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. Here's an open ended
17 question. Do you have any suggestions for preventing a
18 reoccurrence?

19 LT. [REDACTED] For preventing reoccurrence.

20 MR. FURUKAWA: Of a ship going down in a
21 storm, a hurricane?

22 LT. [REDACTED] No. I mean, our Commander had
23 kind of -- had discussed briefly, it's kind of out of
24 our control. And that's kind of why we exist.

25 So, without having -- being, you know, being

1 the Master and knowing exactly what he's thinking and
2 what he was planning for, I can't really speculate on
3 his actions or how to prevent.

4 Or I guess our response in that event. I
5 don't know how we could prevent. But, you know,
6 there's certain factors and lessons learned that we're
7 always able to benefit from to help our response.

8 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. That's about it.
9 Okay. It is 1648 and we're ending the Interview with
10 Lieutenant [REDACTED] the Commander Center Chief
11 Deputy.

12 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went
13 off the record at 4:48 p.m.)
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C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: El Faro Incident
Accident No. DCA16MM001
Interview of Lt. [REDACTED]
Miami, FL

DATE: 10-13-15

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 25 inclusive are to the best of my professional ability a true, accurate, and complete record of the above referenced proceedings as contained on the provided audio recording; further that I am neither counsel for, nor related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action in which this proceeding has taken place; and further that I am not financially nor otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.

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